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Parliamentarians and a European Nuclear Weapon Free Zone: New Prospects and Possibilities

*a briefing paper by the Parliamentary Network for Nuclear Disarmament
International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (Austrian and Swiss Affiliates) and
International Association of Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms (Europe)*

Introduction

Over the years there have been a number of proposals to establish nuclear weapon free zones (NWFZs) in Europe. In 1958, Poland's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Adam Rapacki proposed that Poland, Czechoslovakia,

East Germany and West Germany reject the deployment of nuclear weapons on their territory and join in a NWFZ. In 1963 Finland's President Kekkonen proposed a Nordic NWFZ comprising Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. In the 1970s Romania proposed the denuclearization of the Balkans, and the Soviet Union appealed for creating a nuclear weapon zones in the Mediterranean. However, due to Cold War politics none of these were successful. In any case, the key focus on nuclear weapons constraint was on the stockpiles and policies of the US and USSR.

Following the end of the Cold War, the possibility of establishing a NWFZ in Europe opened up as former Warsaw Pact and Soviet States became free from any deployment of Russian nuclear weapons. In 1996, the Ukraine and Belarus, which under Soviet rule had hosted thousands of nuclear weapons, proposed a NWFZ for Central and Eastern Europe. This was opposed by some former Warsaw Pact countries that were aspiring to join NATO.

New reasons for a zone

There are a number of recent developments that are making the prospect of a NWFZ in Europe both more pressing and more possible. There is a growing threat of nuclear weapons use whether by an emerging nuclear State, and existing nuclear State or a terrorist organization. The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists recently moved the hands of their *Doomsday Clock* to Five Minutes to Midnight reflecting this danger. Even former nuclear advocates such as Henry Kissinger (former US Secretary of State), George Shultz (former US Secretary of Defense) are now warning of the need for nuclear disarmament. NWFZs can reduce such nuclear threats and pave the way to nuclear disarmament.

A European NWFZ would provide security assurances that nuclear weapons would not be used against such countries. It would also contribute to non-proliferation by a) enhancing proliferation control measures, b) giving a binding assurance that nuclear free European countries will remain so, c) encouraging NATO countries that host nuclear weapons to end such deployment, and d) providing a positive example to other regions such as the Middle East and North East Asia.

The Middle East in particular should be encouraged to take steps towards a NWFZ in order to prevent proliferation by countries like Iran or even the possible use of nuclear weapons by Israel. European countries could play a positive role if they 'walked the talk' and established their own NWFZ.

European States that could join a NWFZ



Key



States with US tactical nuclear weapons on their territory



Nuclear Weapon States



Nuclear-weapon-free States



Nuclear-weapon-free States that could be involved in deployment of nuclear weapons or support facilities

Nuclear weapon free nations in Europe (green) could join together in a NWFZ without changing existing policies. Conditionally nuclear weapon free zones would either need to change policies or add a reservation if they joined the NWFZ. Countries in which nuclear weapons are deployed would need to discontinue such deployment to join the NWFZ.

New prospects for success

A number of developments in Europe and internationally are making the prospect of a European NWFZ more achievable.

Political developments since the end of the Cold War have resulted in a corridor of countries that no longer have, or never had, nuclear weapons deployed on their territory (see map on page 1). This now makes possible a NWFZ of contiguous countries without any of these countries having to change current practice.

In addition, there is now a possibility of certain NATO states joining such a NWFZ either now or in the future. It used to be widely believed that countries in military relationship with nuclear countries could not join NWFZs, thus ruling out NATO countries.

However, this belief has been dispelled by the examples of a) Australia, a close military ally of the United States, joining the South Pacific Zone, and b) the recent establishment of a Central Asian NWFZ involving countries amongst which there are close military relationships with Russia (under the Tashkent Treaty) and with the United States (e.g. as part of the "War on terror").

NATO countries in which US tactical nuclear weapons are deployed (Belgium, Germany, Italy, Netherlands and Turkey) would not be able to join a NWFZ until the nuclear weapons are removed, as they have been done from Greece. However, other NATO countries could join a NWFZ either by confirming that they would not permit nuclear weapons deployed on their territories in any circumstances (the preferable option) or by requesting an opt-out clause which could be exercised in time of war.

The undertaking given by NATO not to deploy nuclear weapons in the territories of new NATO countries renders mute the concern of these States that joining a NWFZ would be inconsistent with NATO obligations. Joining NATO thus need not prevent them also joining a European NWFZ.

What a NWFZ would entail

There are nine existing regional NWFZs established by treaty. The provisions of each zone vary. However, each treaty prohibits the manufacture, production, possession, testing and acquisition of nuclear weapons by States or the stationing of nuclear weapons on their territory. In this way the NWFZ obligations go beyond those in the Non-Proliferation Treaty which do not prohibit deployment or stationing of nuclear weapons on the territories of non-nuclear weapon States.

Each of the regional NWFZ treaties also includes protocols to be signed by NWS to respect the zone and to commit not to use nuclear weapons against States parties to the zone.

Growing support for a European NWFZ

The proposal for a European NWFZ is receiving increasing support from a range of sources including governments, academics, NGOs and parliaments:

- At the 60th UN General Assembly the government of Belarus renewed its proposal for a European NWFZ.
- The Belgian Senate adopted a resolution in 2005, without opposition, calling for a NWFZ in Europe.
- The 40th anniversary of the Latin American and Caribbean NWFZ in February 2006 highlighted the possibility of a European NWFZ.
- A group of academics and scientists has recently drafted a Model European NWFZ Treaty.

Opposition to NWFZs

None of the above however has muted the opposition of the United States, France and Russia to the establishment of NWFZs in strategic regions in which they currently deploy, or wish to retain the option to deploy, nuclear weapons. Despite agreeing in principle to the establishment of NWFZs, these three countries took ten years to sign the protocols recognizing the South Pacific Zone, they still have not signed the protocols to the South East Asian NWFZ, and they opposed the establishment of the Central Asian NWFZ.

NWS do not generally support NWFZs because such zones strengthen a global norm against nuclear weapons and gradually curtail the regions in which the NWS can deploy their nuclear weapons. They will thus likely oppose a European NWFZ.

The role of parliamentarians

Parliamentary action has been important in helping establish the current zones, and will be vital to the establishment of a European zone. Parliamentarians can help their governments stand up to the counter pressure from the NWS. Parliamentarians can also promote the idea of a zone to their colleagues in other European parliaments in order to build support. This can happen through parliamentary resolutions, delegations to the Foreign Minister, media work etc...

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